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Greenville Hospital: A public prognosis

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This speech was given yesterday in New Jersey City University.

I represent LibertyHealth System, Inc., the corporate parent of both Greenville Hospital and Jersey City Medical Center.

I am here to present a brief summary of the reasons why the Board of Trustees and LibertyHealth management have decided to request permission to close Greenville Hospital.

This is one of the hardest things the executives and board members of LibertyHealth have ever done. Nobody wants to close a hospital and Greenville Hospital has served the community for more than 100 years. We share the community's sadness over the necessary closing of Greenville Hospital.

The decision that Greenville Hospital should close came after looking at the health care needs of the region and the financial impacts on LibertyHealth. The deciding factors were where the community goes for inpatient hospital care and the duplication of services in the region.

Market share data show that 85 percent of the people who live in the Greenville community do not go to Greenville Hospital when they need inpatient care. Most of the people in the community already go to LibertyHealth's Jersey City Medical Center for inpatient treatment. Also, Christ Hospital across town receives almost as many people from the Greenville community as Greenville Hospital.

Also, most of the patients who go to the Greenville Hospital emergency room are seeking primary care, not emergency care. More patients from Greenville use the Jersey City Medical Center Emergency room now than the Greenville Hospital emergency room, including patients who "walk-in" for care.

After the new Jersey City Medical Center opened on Grand Street, just a short distance from Greenville, LibertyHealth studied Greenville Hospital and its needs, including the requests of the dedicated and caring Greenville physicians for new equipment and building renovations. Greenville Hospital is one of the smallest hospitals in New Jersey with less than 100 in-patient beds. Only about half of the beds are in use on any given day. The size of the hospital and its use limits its medical and financial efficiencies.

A full-service hospital requires modern technology, equipment, physical plant, and clinical expertise in order to serve patients properly. Currently, Greenville Hospital loses more than \$3 million a year and is subsidized by Jersey City Medical Center by an additional \$1 million. The hospital requires an investment of \$6 million for a roof, a new heating ventilation and air conditioning system, asbestos removal, new windows, and upgraded plumbing and electrical systems.

As they should, physicians of Greenville Hospital have requested nearly \$1 million in new equipment to serve their patients. But this same equipment is available at Jersey City Medical Center, just a short distance away.

Greenville Hospital's financial operations are unable to support the on-going demands for the newest technology as well as maintaining the infrastructure of an aging facility. We can no longer bear this cost in today's highly competitive market. We have put in years of struggle to avoid making this sad decision, but the facts are overwhelming:

Admissions to Greenville continue to decline.

Surgery procedures at Greenville Hospital have dropped 35 percent in the past five years.

Greenville and Jersey City Medical Center are only 2.8 miles apart, which makes duplication of facilities and staff both inefficient and costly.

Greenville is losing physicians and has been unable to attract young physicians to support future growth. Since 1999, 30 physicians with admitting privileges have joined the staff. Sixty have resigned.

The Greenville community is well served by mass transit that goes to nearby Jersey Medical Center and other hospitals.

More than 400 licensed hospital beds in Hudson County are vacant on any given day. The other hospitals in the county, including Jersey City Medical Center, could easily care for the patients now cared for by Greenville Hospital.

There is no issue of access to emergency care because the majority of walk-in and ambulance emergencies already go to other hospitals as well. Our EMS service continues to support the emergent needs of the Greenville section of the City.

As this process continues, we are working with our employees to find them jobs at Jersey City Medical Center or at other nearby hospitals, even to train those who need additional skills.

We have made efforts to find other healthcare uses for the building and are continuing to pursue different suggestions, including discussions with Federally qualified health centers to operate a primary care walk-in health center. We are open to community suggestions, physician suggestions and potential buyers.

We cannot provide additional funding or debt to the facility. Health care reimbursement is stringent and is unlikely to get better, which makes additional revenue unlikely. We do not have the financial capacity to support two hospitals in such close proximity that share the same service area.

Most of all, we are working as hard as we can to make sure our patients are inconvenienced as little as possible. Our proposal is to close the building and continue to serve the community. We already serve the Greenville community at Jersey City Medical Center and we will continue to do so for many years to come.

STEVE KIRBY is acting president and CEO of Jersey City Medical Center and its parent company, LibertyHealth System Inc.

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